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ABSTRACT

This report details the action plan of Alberta, Canada to build on recent progress in restructuring and refocusing the province's educational system. The report describes the most common concerns of Albertans regarding the school system, especially related to keeping students in school, meeting special needs of students, and developing a highly skilled workforce. The report outlines the actions to be taken and the results expected in 12 key educational areas: (1) every child can read well; (2) improved support in the classroom; (3) special needs children are supported; (4) learning our language; (5) setting the pace...high standards and positive results; (6) putting programs together for our children, focusing on increasing accessibility; (7) technology provides tools for learning; (8) we work together for success; (9) getting our children to school; (10) a growing Alberta means more children in school; (11) provide solid financial support for the classroom; and (12) improving schools and classrooms. The report concludes with budgetary information. (KB)

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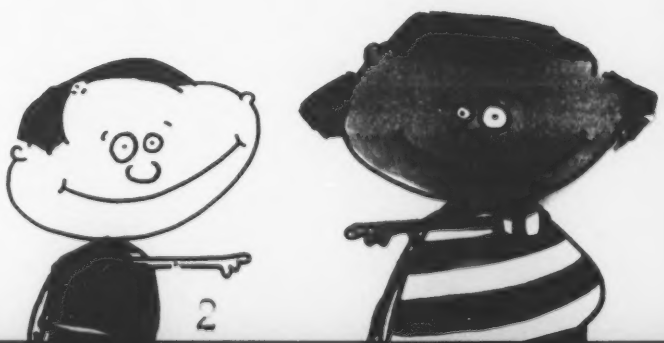

Agenda for Opportunity

There is nothing more important for Albertans than to make sure our children get the best education and the best chance to succeed.

With the following plan, I am confident every student will see a real and positive benefit.

For young children, we are going to do more to ensure that they can read well by the time they begin grade three. With better support for teachers in the classroom, children in the early grades will get the time and attention they need to learn and succeed.

Children with special needs will get the special support they need. And by expanding funding for children with special needs, all children will benefit. Additional resources spent by schools on meeting special needs can now be used in every classroom to benefit every child.

For junior and senior high school students, we'll keep the focus on high standards, keeping students in school, and making sure they have the skills they need when they graduate.

Finally, additional funding for transportation, increased enrolments and costs, and for renovating and fixing schools, means all children will have better transportation, better schools, and a better chance of success.

Over the coming years, we will assess the impact of the following 12 initiatives, make sure they are achieving the results we expect, add new ideas and adjust the priorities to build in new approaches wherever it is necessary.

Education has always been about partnerships with many key players. I want to re-commit this government to work in partnership with **all** those working to ensure … **First things first … our children.**

Sincerely,

Gary G. Mar, Q.C.
Minister of Education

If we want to make a real difference in a child's life ... if we want to dramatically improve chances for success in education ... we need to start early.

Albertans understand the importance of education to the future of every child and to the future of our province. Education is the key that unlocks our children's potential, giving them the knowledge and skills they need, and inspiring them to keep learning throughout their lives.

Albertans want and expect their education system to give children and young people the opportunities they need to learn and to succeed. They want education to be a top priority for their government.

Alberta is fortunate to have an education system that is known as one of the best in Canada. Our students' achievements consistently exceed results in other provinces. We have a good foundation and a long tradition of commitment to excellence in education.

Over the past few years, we have made tremendous progress in restructuring and refocusing Alberta's education system. Throughout, the focus has been students and the classroom ... reducing administration, improving student achievement, providing choices for parents and students, expecting more decisions to be made at the school level, and expanding technology as a tool for students to learn and improve their knowledge. Now, we will build on these changes and move ahead. We will continue to improve Alberta's education system.

We know we can do better. We know there are strains beginning to show in our education system. We know that in a growing province like ours, with more children and new families moving into the province, the first place we see an impact is in our schools. We listened to issues raised by parents, students, teachers, trustees and administrators. And now we are taking action.

The focus of our plan is not on simply spending more money to do the same. Instead, we are putting first things first.

Putting our children first. And especially putting young children first – giving them the good start they need to read, to learn, and to succeed.

The critical difference in this action plan is the focus on young children. If we want to make a real difference for children, we need to start when they are young. We will assess students' skills and identify any learning difficulties when they are still in early childhood programs. We will make certain children can read by the time they enter grade three. We will emphasize teaching them the skills and the confidence they need to keep learning. We will need to work more effectively with others in the community to address students' unique needs, because for many, their needs extend beyond the classroom.

For the next few years, action on education will follow through on the specific initiatives outlined in this package, then assess the impact, and determine where further changes are needed. Government's Three Year Plan for Education will reflect this package of initiatives. Specific strategies will be contained in the new plan. We will work closely with school boards, teachers, parents and administrators. And through these actions, we will keep the focus where it belongs ...on our children.

BUILDING ON A STRONG FOUNDATION

Albertans have a long history of supporting education, and they expect their education system to be one of the best in the world. People involved in Alberta's education system – teachers, parents, administrators, school trustees, community members and Alberta Education staff – have worked hard over the years to meet those expectations.

The result is a solid foundation for our education system.

Think about the changes that have taken place over the last few years.

- Annual achievement tests in grades three, six and nine have been expanded and diploma exams have been added for Science 30, Social Studies 33 and Math 33.
- Albertans now receive annual reports on the performance of the education system from the provincial government, their school board and their children's school.
- New science and math programs have been developed, and there's a new statement setting out expectations for kindergarten programs. Actions have been taken to improve the achievement of high school students in math.
- A strong emphasis has been placed on keeping kids in school and increasing the number of students who complete high school. As a result, almost 70 per cent of Alberta's students now complete high school.

70 per cent of Alberta's students complete high school

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- School councils operate in every school in the province, giving parents the opportunity to get involved in their child's school.
- Charter schools have been introduced to give more choice to parents and students.
- Several schools in the province now operate "virtual programs" – programs where students are linked to school by computers and the Internet.
- The number of school boards has been reduced from 181 to 62, funding for administration has been capped, and more decisions now are made at the school level rather than in central offices.
- New funding for technology has allowed schools to purchase computers, equipment and software programs for their classrooms.
- We have moved to full provincial funding for education.
- Standards for quality teaching have been developed.

These are just highlights. Across the province, teachers, principals and school boards have responded to the challenges of restructuring education. They have reorganized and restructured how they deliver programs, made the best use of the resources they have, and directed their attention to the classroom. Schools have actively involved parents, the business community, and a broad range of community members in finding the best solutions for their students' unique needs.

All of this means that dramatic changes are not needed in Alberta's school system. We are starting from a strong position. What we need now is an added boost … a combination of additional funding to address pressure points in the system and a real, concerted effort to give young children the edge they need to succeed and keep on learning.

Listening to Albertans

In the past few months, we listened to the concerns of Albertans.

The most common themes are these:

- Do not abandon our efforts to keep older students in school, improve their achievement, and give them the skills they need to go on to post-secondary education or right into the workforce. But if we really want to make a difference, we need to do more when our children are very young, especially to make sure they can read well.
- Ensure that children with special needs receive the attention and the support in school they need. More children in school have special education needs, whether those needs stem from mild learning problems, very complex physical, mental, emotional and behavioural disabilities or being gifted students. Teachers and schools are having a difficult time coping with these children without additional support.

- A highly skilled workforce is critical to the future of our economy. Alberta's schools have a crucial role to play in ensuring that young people graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge they need. We must ensure students have the motivation and desire to keep learning. Young people need to know the importance of an education to open the doors to post-secondary education or that all-important first job.
- The Alberta Growth Summit said "people development" should be the first priority for the province. And that clearly translates into a strong emphasis on education.
- Many have said that our schools simply need more money to deliver the services our children need. Our province is growing, and more students mean added pressures on the limited resources available in schools. At the same time, people want the additional dollars targetted to areas where they can make a real difference for children.
- School boards have said that many of their schools are aging and need repairs and renovations. A growing population also means overcrowded classrooms and the need for new schools. It is important that we maintain our investment in the more than 1400 schools and make sure that classrooms provide the kind of environment students need to learn, achieve and succeed.
- Knowledge and education will be the key to every child's future success, and to the future prosperity of our province. In a province like Alberta, we will not settle for an education system that is anything less than the best.
- People want Alberta's young people to succeed in school. They want them to meet high – made in Alberta – standards and develop strong skills. They want our students to match up with the best in the world. And they want a school system where no one gets left behind.

We listened to these concerns. This action plan takes direct aim at solving problems we know are in our school system. But it also takes a longer term view, knowing that there are no quick fixes in education, and knowing that the best way to make a difference is to start at the beginning, with young children just entering school.

Most important, the focus of this action plan and all actions in education must be on the central theme – **First things first ... our children**.

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Over the coming years, we will build on the foundation now in place and direct our energies and actions in 12 key areas.

1. Every child can read well.

Most young children come to school eager and ready to learn. This means they catch on quickly, learn to read, and steadily build their skills. These children become confident learners, ready to take on new challenges and learn new skills and ideas.

But for some children, learning to read does not come as easily. Some may not have early experiences with reading, listening to their parents read to them or exploring words and pictures in books. Others may have learning difficulties that make learning to read a challenge.

We know that learning to read is the first and most important building block to education success. Unless children can read and read well, they have difficulty learning other skills, learning to solve problems in math, understanding new concepts or expressing their ideas. Children who have reading problems quickly lose confidence in their ability to learn.

Actions to be taken

- Introduce an early reading initiative focused on children from kindergarten to grade two. The initiative will begin in May 1998 with full implementation planned for September 1998.
- Assess children's ability to recognize letters, know the sounds they make and begin to recognize some words and colours in kindergarten, then follow-up with special strategies for children who are having difficulty.
- Hire intern teachers to work with classroom teachers in kindergarten to grade two. With additional funding, roughly 540 intern teachers can be hired specifically to help young children learn to read. Intern teachers would help assess the reading abilities of children in kindergarten and start working with students that show early signs of falling behind.
- Work with teachers and school boards to develop the necessary support materials and demonstration models. Schools will have the flexibility they need to develop the best approaches for their children.

Results we expect

- By the time children enter grade three, they will be able to read well.
- Children at risk will get the special help and attention they need so they can learn to read and get a good start on future education success.
- More children will meet the acceptable standards set by language arts achievement tests at the grade three level.
- First time teachers will get direct experience in the classroom and a "foot in the door" for their future teaching careers.

2. Improved support in the classroom

For children to learn, they need time and attention. They need someone who sees when they are struggling, helps them with explanations, provides the inspiration and "push" to learn more, and celebrates their successes. This is especially important for young children in the early grades.

In some elementary classrooms, teachers are struggling to provide that special one-on-one attention children need. Whether it is because there are too many children in the class or because there are several children with special education needs in the same class, teachers need additional support so they can teach and children can learn. One of the ways to do this is to provide help in the classroom, so teachers can spend more time with individual students.

Actions to be taken

- Provide additional support to hire teacher aides to work with classroom teachers in grades one to six.

Results we expect

- Combined with other initiatives and additional support provided in this package, teachers will have better support in the classroom and have more time to spend with individual children.
- Roughly 370 teacher aides will be hired for schools across the province. This is on top of the number of teacher aides already working in schools, and does not include additional support for children with special needs.

3. Special needs children are supported

The number of children with special education needs in Alberta's schools today is growing rapidly. Estimates are that the number of children with severe disabilities will increase from 6,500 in 1996/1997 to 8,000 in the 1997/1998 school year.

Schools also are seeing an increase in the number of children with mild and moderate learning disabilities.

The reasons why the numbers are increasing are complex. As enrolments increase, it is reasonable to expect a corresponding increase in the number of children with special education needs. In addition, improved medical care is helping more children with severe disabilities live longer and attend school. Improved assessment techniques help spot particular learning problems in children who may have fallen between the cracks in the past. And for some children, problems in their families can result in difficulties learning in school.

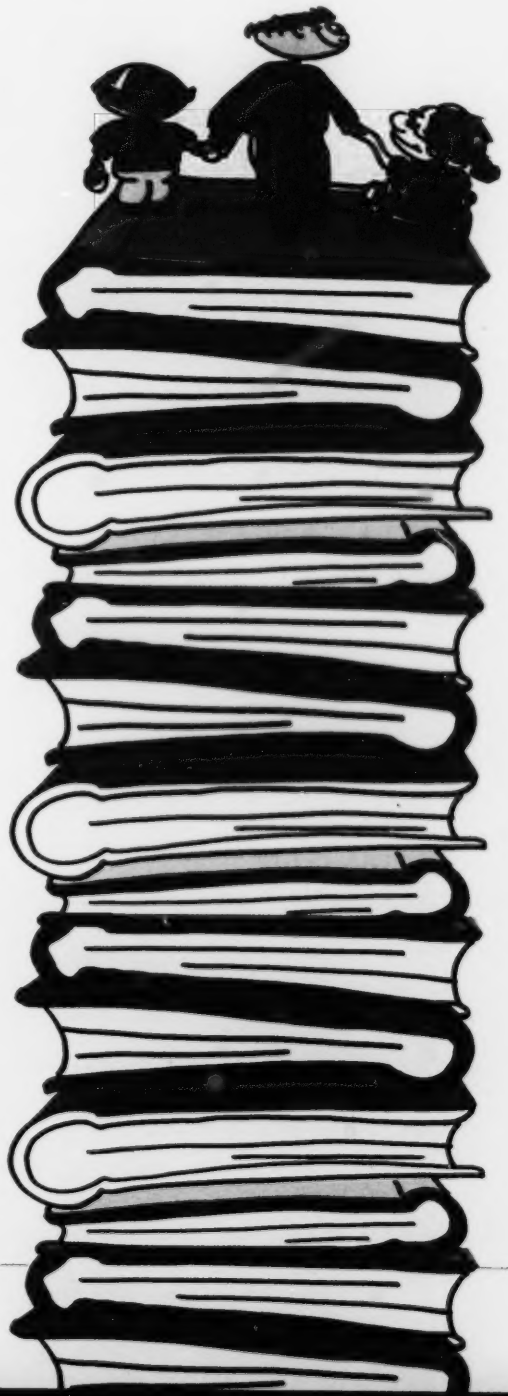
Schools have worked hard to provide programs for children with special needs. Funding that is intended to support all children is being used to meet special needs.

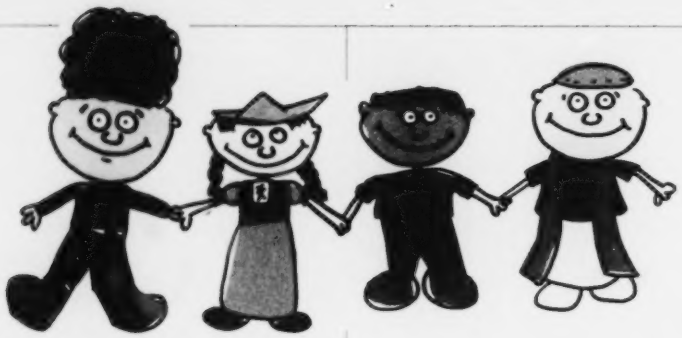
Actions to be taken

- Increase the current funding for children with mild and moderate special needs by 30 per cent. This funding will continue to be part of the basic per student allocation, but it will be targetted to children with mild and moderate disabilities and school boards will be expected to report on how the money was spent.
- Increase the current funding for children with severe special needs by 30 per cent as well. This will increase funding for each child with severe physical and mental disabilities from $8,910 to $11,600.
- Maintain funding for children with severe emotional/behavioural needs at the current levels – $8,910 for each child.

Results we expect

- Children with special needs will get the help and support they need.
- Teachers will have additional support for meeting the needs of these special children in their classrooms.





4. Learning our language

We understand that some children and families new to Alberta have an additional challenge of learning to speak English. And for many years, government and school boards have supported English as a Second Language (ESL) programs for children who come to Alberta from other countries and who don't speak English to ensure they are not left behind.

But there are many children born in Canada whose first language isn't English. They come to school with the same challenges as children new to Canada, but have not been eligible for the special support that an English as a Second Language program provides. These children may come from Native families where their first language is Cree or Blackfoot. They may come from particular communities where the language spoken at home is not English.

Actions to be taken

- Extend eligibility for English as a Second Language programs to all children whose first language is not English, including children who are born in Canada. (ESL programming is provided for a maximum of three years).
- Focus the programs from kindergarten to grade three so these children get the early help they need to learn English.

Results we expect

- Canadian-born children who don't speak English as their first language will quickly become proficient in English.
- The chances of long term success of these children in school will be improved dramatically.
- Improved results on grade three language arts achievement tests.

5. Setting the pace ... high standards and positive results

We already noted that Albertans want and expect students to meet high standards and to be able to compete with the best in the world. They want an education system with high expectations and a deliberate commitment to making sure those expectations are met.

Alberta is known as a leader in setting standards and testing students' achievements. In the past few years, we have expanded achievement testing programs so they now cover all core courses for children in grades three, six and nine. We added new courses to the list of diploma exams students are expected to write before they can graduate from high school.

Special emphasis has been placed on improving math skills of students at the high school level.

This important work must continue as part of this new action plan. By focusing on young children, and making sure they can read, we will give more children a chance to succeed and meet the high standards we set.

Actions to be taken

- Continue to provide information to parents about what children are expected to learn.
- Continue to work with other provinces and territories to develop common curriculum standards and learning materials.
- Set clear expectations for reading and writing in the early grades.
- Increase the emphasis on problem solving so children can apply their knowledge.
- Revise curriculum to emphasize business awareness, employability skills and career education.

Results we expect

- Students consistently achieve high standards.
- Young children get the special help and attention they need so they can succeed.
- Ongoing improvements are made in Alberta's curriculum.
- Parents and community members understand what's expected of children in school and are satisfied with the results they see.
- A five per cent increase in the number of students meeting the acceptable standard of achievement in grade three language arts over the next three years.

6. Putting programs together for children

Children come to school with a wide variety of needs. Some can be addressed by schools, but others go beyond the expertise or responsibilities of schools and teachers to address.

Today, there are a number of government departments and community organizations providing help and support for children. Too often, though, these programs are not well co-ordinated. Different groups may not be working together, combining their resources and expertise to get the best benefit for every child. People working with children may not always know what is available in their communities. Teachers and others working in schools want children to have better access to the services they need.

Work is underway in Alberta Family and Social Services to redesign children's services and improve co-ordination and access to services for children within communities across the province. As this work proceeds, schools and Alberta Education will play an active role, working with local agencies and organizations to focus resources on meeting children's needs.

Actions to be taken

- Play an active role in plans to redesign children's services.
- Provide guidelines to schools to help them work with local agencies to improve services for students with special needs.
- Work with other government departments, particularly Health and Family and Social Services, to ensure that the health and related needs of children are met.

- Targetted funding for Native education initiatives will be jointly planned with Family and Social Services.
- Work with Health to improve speech and language assistance to children in schools.

Results we expect

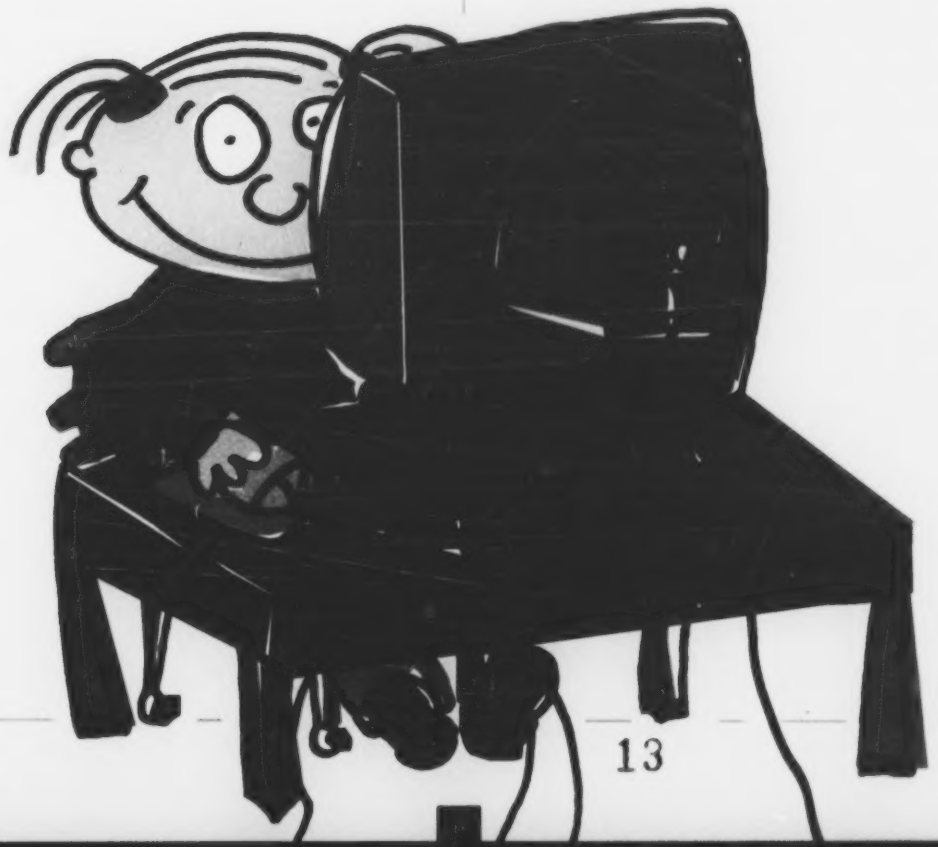
- For children at risk, there is a continuity from health programs for newborns and young children, to early intervention programs in the community, to early reading help once they begin kindergarten and the early years of school.
- Community agencies, government departments, health authorities, and schools work together to put children first and ensure their needs are met.

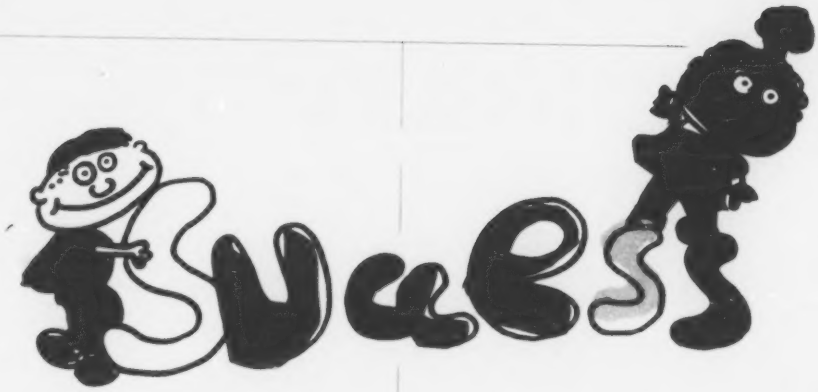
7. Technology provides tools for learning

Look around our homes or where we work. Think about how we do business today, how we keep in touch with friends and family, or how we search out new information. Chances are you'll find technology is front and centre.

The same is true for schools. Technology provides a tool for learning and a link to vast amounts of information through the Internet. Students leaving high school need technology skills to help them on the job, with further education, or with a lifetime of learning. And for young children, technology provides an important tool to expand their learning.

Since 1996, the provincial government has provided targetted funds to help school boards cover the costs of information technology, whether for computers, access to the Internet,





or for software. However, one of the current requirements is that school boards have to match provincial funds. This requirement for matching funds places a heavy burden on many schools, particularly in smaller communities.

Actions to be taken

- Remove the requirement for matching funds.
- Maintain targetted funding for technology integration in schools as a key part of education.
- Encourage new ways of integrating information technology in the classroom by working with teachers, businesses, post-secondary institutions and education faculties.

Results we expect

- Students leave school with a good working knowledge of information technology and the skills to use it in their future studies and work.
- Young children have access to information technology as a tool to expand their learning.
- Teachers are able to show students how to use technology as a learning tool.

8. We work together for success

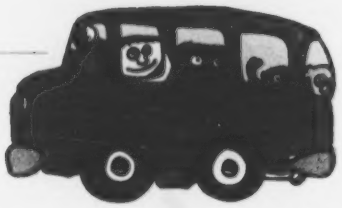
This building block is not new. But it is more essential than ever for the success of children in school.

For the past few years, we have encouraged people to get more actively involved in the education system. Putting first things first applies not just to teachers and schools. It means people have to work together. And that includes parents, education professionals, people in the business community, in the arts and cultural organizations, seniors – all community members.

At the Alberta Growth Summit, people from all walks of life agreed on a single priority – people development. In education, that means developing capable and well educated children. It means preparing young people for the workforce of tomorrow, with the understanding that learning will be a constant part of their lives.

Schools need the participation and support of business people to give young people an understanding of the world of work and the skills they need to get a job, start a career, or launch their own business. Community members can teach children about community responsibility, good citizenship, and helping others in need. Artists, performers, athletes,

seniors, professionals … everyone has something to offer. We need their help.



Actions to be taken

- Improve the transition for young people from school to work and further learning.
- Work with business people, educators and other government departments to help young people explore career options and make sure they have up-to-date information about careers and job opportunities.
- Strengthen connections between schools and the workplace.

Results we expect

- Young people have the skills they need to go on to further education or enter the workforce and make a positive contribution.
- Children become good citizens and contributing members of their communities.

9. Getting our children to school

For many Alberta children, their school day starts when they get on the school bus first thing in the morning. Transportation of students is an important part of Alberta's education system.

Parents expect their children to get to school safely, on time, and by the most direct route possible. School boards understand that the costs of meeting those expectations are growing. In large urban areas, student transportation costs have increased 12 to 14 per cent. The last time school transportation funding was increased was in 1992/1993. Combined with increasing costs, making sure school buses are well maintained is a primary concern.

Actions to be taken

- Provide additional support to school boards to address the costs of new buses, insurance, maintenance, fuel, and drivers' wages.
- Implement a new rural transportation funding formula that encourages and rewards greater efficiency.

Results we expect

- More efficient transportation of students.
- Improved maintenance for school buses.

10. A growing Alberta means more children in school

All the signs for continuing growth and prosperity in Alberta are positive. We know that with growth comes added pressures. As the Alberta Advantage attracts more people to the province, schools are one of the first places to feel the impact of a growing population.

In Alberta, funding is guaranteed for every child in school. School boards receive funding based on the number of students they have. To not recognize growth in our schools would compromise the long-standing guarantee of funding every child and make it difficult for schools to provide children with the programs they need.

Actions to be taken

- Provide additional provincial funding to support an expected increase of two per cent in the number of children in school.

Results we expect

- Funding for schools will increase based on realistic expectations about growing numbers of children in the province.

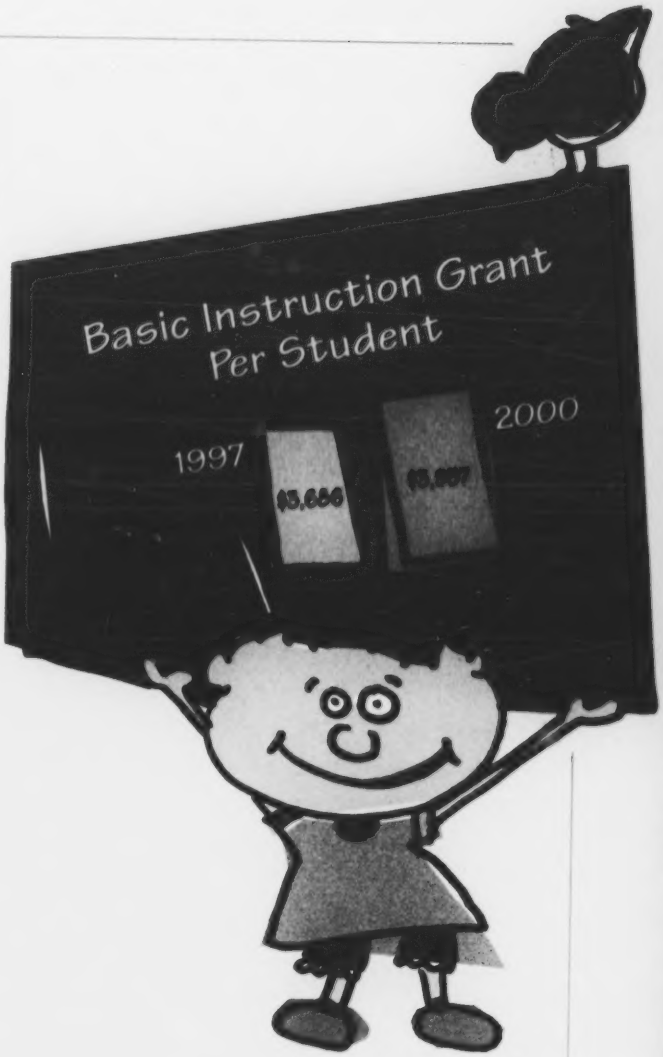
11. Provide solid financial support for the classroom

To meet the needs of all the children they serve, schools need a solid base of financial support. Over the past four years, funding for education was reduced as part of government's balanced budget plans. Now that the goal of a balanced budget has been achieved, and government is on track with debt reduction, money is available to re-invest where it is needed most. Education for Albertans is at the top of the list.

For the past four years, costs have been gradually increasing while resources remained limited. Schools need an appropriate base of funds and the flexibility to use those funds in the best ways possible to meet their students' needs. Increasing the basic funding for instruction in schools is the best way for the province to ensure that the needs of all children are being met. With a solid base of funding, schools can direct funds where they are needed most.

Actions to be taken

- In September 1998, increase the portion of the basic instruction grant for mild and moderate disabilities ($250) by thirty per cent ($325).
- Increase the balance of the basic instruction grant ($3,466) by two per cent in September 1998.
- In September 1999, increase the basic instruction grant by one per cent, and by an additional one per cent in September 2000.
- With these increases, the basic instruction grant for every student in the public education system will increase from $3,686 in 1997/1998 to $3,937 by September 2000.



Results we expect

- Schools have a solid base of funding, the flexibility to use those resources wisely, and to make sure the needs of children come first.

12. Improve schools and classrooms

Today, two-thirds of Alberta schools are more than 25 years old. For anyone who owns a 25 year old house, even with regular maintenance you know that renovations and repairs are needed.

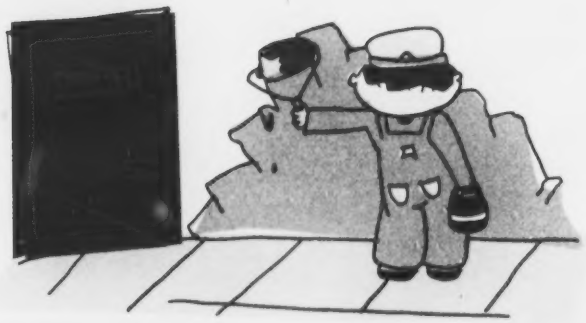
Over the past few years, many school capital projects were put on hold. The result is a substantial backlog of school maintenance and renovation projects.

Actions to be taken

- Increase total spending on school capital projects by special infusion of an additional $100 million in 1997/1998.
- Introduce new approaches to capital funding so that a block amount of funds is available to schools to cover regular and ongoing maintenance of schools.
- Increase funding of equipment needed for Career and Technology Studies programs in the capital funding available to schools.

Results we expect

- Students will continue to have safe, healthy, and positive learning environments in their schools and classrooms.



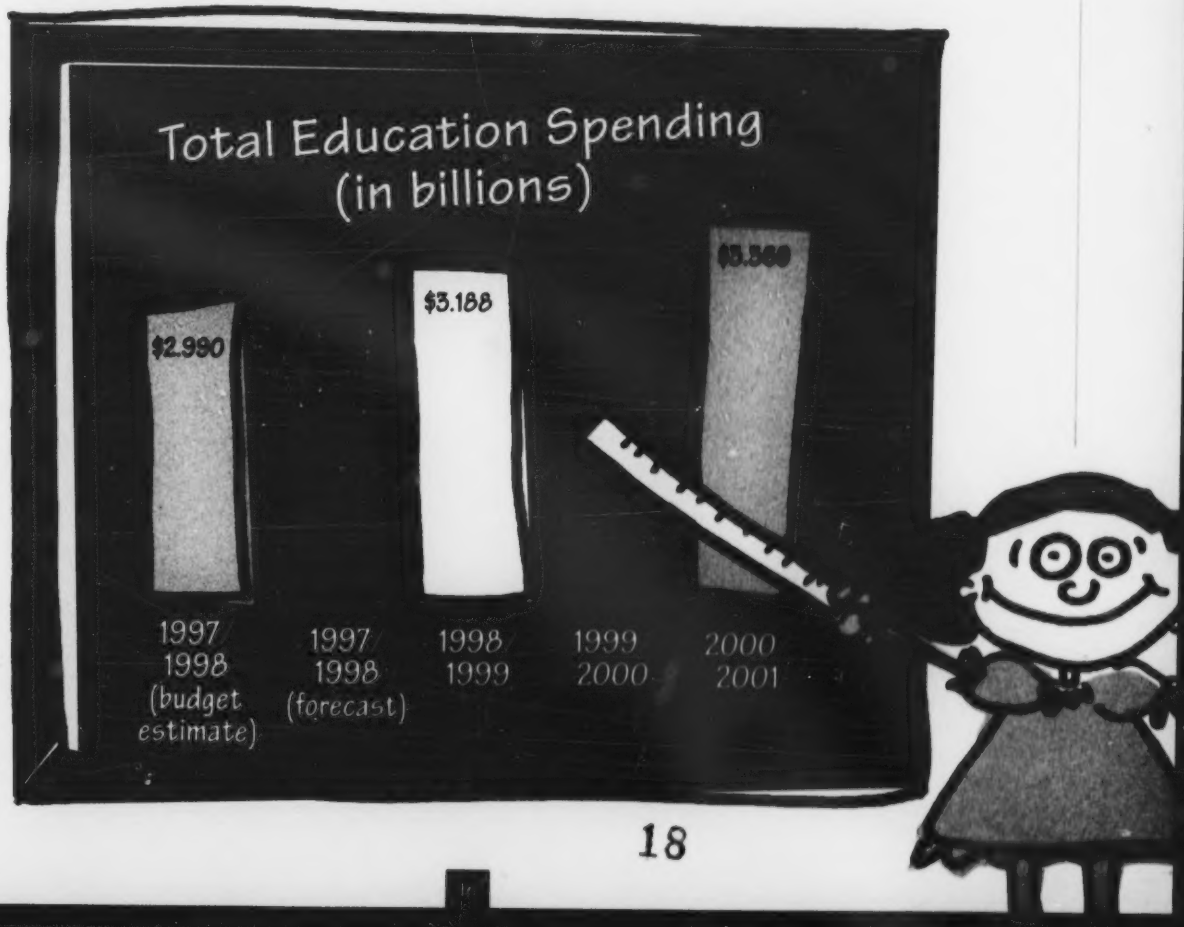
Next steps to implementation

With this action plan in place, steps will be taken immediately on each of the 12 points. For programs like the early reading initiative, children in kindergarten in the spring of 1998 will be the first ones to see the direct impact. For most of the other components, implementation and adjustments to funding will begin with the next school year, starting in September 1998.

Work will begin immediately to fine tune this action plan with school boards, principals and teachers, and to ensure they are involved directly in the next steps. The special focus on young children means that elementary schools and primary teachers will have a vital role to play in the coming months.

While the focus is on children and what these initiatives will do to improve their education, we know that funding is important. Each of the initiatives outlined in this package comes with a price tag. The costs are substantial. This package of initiatives will result in total education spending of $3.188 billion in 1998/1999. Total education spending will increase to $3.369 billion by 2000/2001.

This additional spending is possible today because of the actions we took four years ago to balance the budget and begin to pay down Alberta's debt. The benefits of the tough course we had to take now will go directly to children.



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We listened to the concerns of Albertans, and the most common themes were:

- Do more with our young children to make sure they can read well.
- Ensure that children with special needs receive the attention and the support in school they need.
- A highly skilled workforce is critical to the future of our economy. Alberta's schools play a crucial role in ensuring that high school graduates have the skills and knowledge they need.
- Our schools need more money to deliver the services our children need.
- Schools are aging and need repairs and renovations.

The focus of this action plan and all actions in education must be on the central theme – **First things first ... our children**.

Over the coming years, we will build on the foundation now in place in education and direct our energies and actions in 12 key areas.

1. Every child can read well.

We know that learning to read is the first and most important building block to education success. Unless children can read and read well, they have difficulty learning other skills, learning to solve problems in math, understanding new concepts or expressing their ideas.

Actions to be taken

- Introduce an early reading initiative focused on children from kindergarten to grade two, beginning in May 1998.
- Hire intern teachers to work with classroom teachers in kindergarten to grade two to help assess the reading abilities of children in kindergarten and start working with students that show early signs of falling behind.

Results we expect

- By the time children enter grade three, they will be able to read well.
- Children at risk will get the special help and attention they need.
- First time teachers will get direct experience in the classroom.

2. Improved support in the classroom

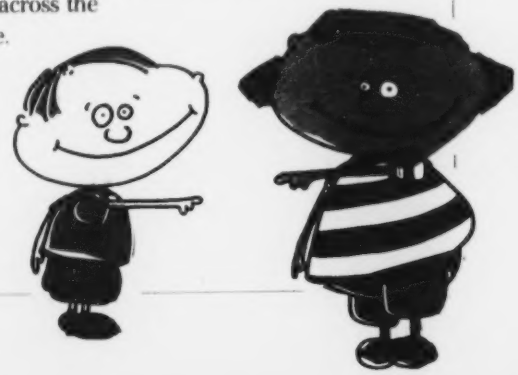
For children to learn, they need time and attention, especially in the early grades.

Actions to be taken

- Provide additional support to hire teacher aides to work with classroom teachers in grades one to six.

Results we expect

- Teachers will have more time to spend with individual children.
- Roughly 370 teacher aides will be hired for schools across the province.



3. Special needs children are supported

The number of children with special education needs in Alberta's schools today is growing rapidly.

Actions to be taken

- Increase the current funding for children with mild and moderate special needs by 30 per cent. This funding will continue to be part of the basic per student allocation, but it will be targetted to children with mild and moderate disabilities.
- Increase the current funding for children with severe special needs by 30 per cent as well. This will increase funding for each child with severe physical and mental disabilities from $8,910 to $11,600.
- Maintain funding for children with severe emotional/behavioural needs at the current levels – $8,910 for each child.

Results we expect

- Children with special needs will get the help and support they need.
- Teachers will have additional support for meeting the needs of these special children in their classrooms.

4. Learning our language

There are children born in Canada whose first language isn't English. In the past, they have not been eligible for the special support that an English as a Second Language program provides. These children may come from Native families or particular communities where the language spoken at home is not English.

Actions to be taken

- Extend eligibility for English as a Second Language programs to Canadian-born children whose first language is not English to ensure they are not left behind. (ESL programming is provided for a maximum of three years).
- Focus the programs from kindergarten to grade three.

Results we expect

- Canadian-born children who don't speak English as their first language will quickly become proficient in English.
- Improved resulted on grade three language arts achievement tests.

5. Setting the pace ... high standards and positive results

Alberta is a leader in setting standards and testing students' achievements. We have expanded achievement testing to cover all core courses for grades three, six and nine. We have added new courses to the list of high school diploma exams.

Special emphasis has been placed on improving high school math skills.

Actions to be taken

- Set clear expectations for reading and writing in the early grades.
- Increase the emphasis on problem solving so children can apply their knowledge.
- Revise curriculum to emphasize business awareness, employability skills and career education.

Results we expect

- Students consistently achieve high standards.
- A five per cent increase in the number of students meeting the acceptable standard of achievement in grade three language arts over the next three years.

6. Putting programs together for children

There are a number of government departments and community organizations providing help and support for children. Teachers and others working in schools want children to have better access to the services they need.

Work is underway in Alberta Family and Social Services to

redesign children's services and improve co-ordination and access to services for children within communities across the province.

Actions to be taken

- Play an active role in plans to redesign children's services to focus resources on meeting children's needs.
- Work with other government departments to ensure that the health and related needs of children are met.
- Work with Health to improve speech and language assistance to children in schools.

Results we expect

- Community agencies, government departments, health authorities, and schools work together to put children first and ensure their needs are met.

7. Technology provides tools for learning

Since 1996, the government has targetted funds to help school boards cover the costs of information technology, whether for computers, access to the Internet, or for software. School boards have been required to match provincial funds.

Actions to be taken

- Remove the requirement for matching funds.
- Encourage new ways of integrating information technology in the classroom by working with teachers, businesses, post-secondary institutions and education faculties.

Results we expect

- Students have the technology knowledge and skills to use in their future studies and work.
- Teachers are able to show students how to use technology as a learning tool.

8. We work together for success

This building block is not new. But it is essential for the success of children in school.

We have encouraged people to get more actively involved in the education system – parents, education professionals, business and community members.

Actions to be taken

- Improve the transition for students from school to work and further learning.
- Work with business, educators and other government departments to help young people explore career options.

Results we expect

- Young people have the skills they need to go on to further education or enter the workforce, and make a positive contribution.

9. Getting our children to school

Transportation of students is an important part of Alberta's education system.

Actions to be taken

- Provide additional support to school boards to address the costs of new buses, insurance, maintenance, fuel, and drivers' wages.
- Implement a new rural transportation funding formula that encourages and rewards greater efficiency.

Results we expect

- More efficient transportation of students.
- Improved maintenance for school buses.

10. A growing Alberta means more children in school

As the Alberta Advantage attracts more people to the province, schools are one of the first places to feel the impact of a growing population.

Actions to be taken

- Provide additional funding to support an expected annual enrolment increase of two per cent.

Results we expect

- Funding for schools will based on the higher numbers of children coming to the province.

11. Provide solid financial support for the classroom

Increasing the basic funding for instruction in schools is the best way to ensure that the needs of all children are being met.

Actions to be taken

- Increase basic instruction grants to schools by two per cent in September 1998, one per cent in September 1999, and one per cent in September 2000. The basic instruction grant for every student in the public education system will increase from $3,686 in 1997 to $3,937 by September 2000.

Results we expect

- Schools have a solid base of funding, the flexibility to use those resources wisely, and to make sure the needs of children come first.

12. Improving schools and classrooms

Over the past few years, many school capital projects were put on hold. There is a substantial need for investment in schools and classrooms across the province.

Actions to be taken

- Increase total spending on school capital projects by a special infusion of an additional $100 million in 1997/1998.
- Introduce new approaches to capital funding to cover regular and ongoing maintenance of schools.

Results we expect

- Students will continue to have safe, healthy, and positive learning environments.

Concluding comments

The focus of this plan is on children and what these initiatives will do to improve their education. These initiatives will result in total education spending of $3.188 billion in 1998/1999. Total education spending will increase to $3.369 billion by 2000/2001.

Over the coming years, we will assess the impact of these 12 initiatives, make sure they are achieving the results we expect, add new ideas and adjust the priorities to build in new approaches wherever it is necessary.

The details of this action plan will change to meet changing needs. But the simple commitment will remain – **First things first ... our children.**

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